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# ABBEY LINCOLN



TALKING TO THE SUN

COMPACT  
**disc**  
DIGITAL AUDIO  
STEREO

**Abbey Lincoln**

vocal

**Steve Coleman**

alto sax

**James Weidman**

piano

**Billy Johnson**

bass

**Mark Johnson**

drums

**Jerry Gonzalez**

percussion

**Arlene Knox**

back up vocal

**Bemshee Shirer**

back up vocal

**Naima Williams**

back up vocal



**enja**

406C

DIGITAL

MASTERING



ENJA CD 4060

ABBEY LINCOLN - TALKING TO THE SUN

Recorded by David Baker at Classic Sound, NYC, Nov. 1983. Photography by Scott Sternbach, design Elisabeth Winkelmann.

Produced by Matthias Winkelmann.

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ENJA CD 4060 ABBEY LINCOLN - TALKING TO THE SUN

ENJA CD 4060

**ENJA CD 4060-2**

# **ABBEY LINCOLN**

## **TALKING TO THE SUN**

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|--|-------------|
| <b>1. The River</b> (Abbey Lincoln)                                | <b>4:57</b> |
| <b>2. Whistling Away The Dark</b> (Mercer · Mancini)               | <b>4:29</b> |
| <b>3. Talking To The Sun</b> (Abbey Lincoln)                       | <b>5:44</b> |
| <b>4. You And I</b> (Stevie Wonder)                                | <b>3:55</b> |
| <b>5. People On The Street</b> (Abbey Lincoln)                     | <b>5:53</b> |
| <b>6. You're My Thrill</b> (Gorney · Clare)                        | <b>5:59</b> |
| <b>7. Prelude - A Wedding Song</b> (Villa · Lobos / Abbey Lincoln) | <b>8:25</b> |
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In the studio, a strikingly beautiful woman began, in music but without words, to express rage. The fury, the frustration, the deep song in those cries, stunned all the musicians in the room – from Coleman Hawkins to the young Booker Little. The woman was Abbey Lincoln; the rage was part of Max Roach's *Freedom Now Suite* which I was recording for the long since departed Candid label. Abbey did more that day and on a subsequent album of her own, to finally and totally demolish the initial "image" of her that had emerged in the music business. Born in Chicago, brought up in Michigan, she first acquired a following as a "supper club singer". These are performers who do not have to sing with any particular distinctiveness, but they do have to be very attractive, very sensuous. The are on exhibit.

This role became increasingly uncomfortable for Abbey Lincoln, all the more so after she met Max Roach who began to expand her listening horizons as well as her desire to say more, to be more, in her music. And so, Abbey began to record as a jazz singer with such deeply challenging musicians as Sonny Rollins, Kenny Dorham, Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers and Max Roach. (One such session was *That's Him!* on Riverside, recently reissued.) Three years later came *The Freedom Now Suite* and her own set, *Straight Ahead*, also on Candid.

In the 1960's Abbey continued to be a singularly compelling element in the jazz scene, but also appeared in movies, one of which was the lyrically successful "For Love Of Ivy" (1968), co-starring Sidney Poitier.

More and more, however, Abbey was becoming less interested in the traditional trappings of "stardom" and more involved in finding her own roots, personal and cultural. She expended considerable time and energy in groups working to develop black political and cultural consciousness, and she also became immersed in studying the historic contributions of black women through time.

All this led increasingly to her appreciation of the vital importance of Africa, past and present. Abbey travelled to that continent and during a 1975 visit, she was given the name Aminata, by the president of Guinea, and the surname of Moseka by the Minister of Education in Zaire.

After some years in California, Abbey, some two years ago made New York her base of operations – both as a singer and as the star and orchestrator of a one-woman show, "Talkin' To The Sun", with accompanying musicians, singers, and dancers.

This album for ENJA, she says, is "finally my music. I conceived it; I'm the band leader; I choose every song of the album; the arrangements are mine; and I selected the musicians."

The essence of the music is the essence of Abbey Lincoln – independence. *The River* is by Abbey. "I used to live on Venice Boulevard in Los Angeles", she recalls. "It's a really busy freeway and I used to hear all this traffic in the night and in the morning. It sounded just like a river."

*Whistling Away The Dark* was written by Johnny Mercer and Henry Mancini. "It says exactly what I wanted to say. I didn't know Mercer and Mancini had addressed that kind of subject matter." I expect anyone will find in this song – especially in the way Abbey makes it real – memories like hers.

*Talking To The Sun* is a song by Abbey based on a conversation she once had with a friend of hers from Ghana. "He was telling me how he used to talk to the sun late everyday in a special place he had found. Well, there came a time when, after he had studied to be a lawyer, he couldn't find a job. He had done everything he was supposed to, but still no job. After seven day he dreamed the sun was standing behind him. The next day he went to that spot where he used to talk to the sun, and he saw plants he had never seen before. So, from the law, he went into raising these beautiful plants."

Stevie Wonder's *You And Me* was brought to Abbey by a young singer. "I fell in love with it", she says, "because it's a beautiful story about the need people have for one another. We are in this life together, so we might as well fall in love."

The powerfully affecting *People On The Street* comes, like all of Abbey's songs, from personal experience. "Where I lived in California", she says, "I'd see old ladies in rags on the street. Then I came to New York, and I saw bag ladies – homeless women living out of whatever they could carry around in bags. I thought: what's wrong with everybody? We must all be crazy. If we keep on ignoring how these people are being treated, we'll be next. We don't have long to fix this."

*You Are My Thrill* is a song Abbey has been singing for the last twenty years. The recorded version that first directed her toward the song was that of Billie Holiday. Here, as on every track, there are the same characteristics of Abbey Lincoln's style: the penetrating, incisive, emotionally reverberating sound; the speech-like rhythms; and the thrust of an independent spirit for whom song is life.

The Villa-Lobos *Prelude (A Wedding Song)*, with lyrics by Abbey Lincoln first came into her consciousness years ago when Max Roach, while courting her, would play a recording of the original. "I wrote these lyrics", she added, "but never recorded or used them. The piece itself, as rhythms were added on to it, went to another place and gradually became more Eastern in flavor".

As for the resilient and attentive combo behind her Abbey emphasizes: "It's the best band I've had yet. They are all virtuoso musicians, but there is a sympathetic (collective) thing musically. I want to tour with the musicians on this album. These players don't bring bitterness into their music; they are fresh in sound and in conception. They've been with me for a year and a half, and I hope we keep going on."

Through the years Abbey's singing has become stronger, deeper and more personal. For all its force, she seems very much at ease with herself these nights. All that energy and honesty and desire for justice have been focused into her music. All her fire is concentrated now.

"I'm thankful for the music", she told me. "The music takes care of me. If I didn't have my music, I don't know what I'd do." The commitment is total; the results stay in the mind long after the performance is over, for this is more than a performance. It's life being continually reflected on.

— Nat Hentoff  
New York, 1983

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1. The River - 2. Whistling in the Dark
3. Talking to the Sun - 4. You and I
5. People on the Street
6. You're my Thrill
7. Prelude (A Wedding Song)

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